



Building public awareness for rangelands and pastoralists via social media and the FIFA World Cup 2026

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Abstract

Overall, our global population has a very limited knowledge of rangeland ecosystems and the communities who most depend on them, despite the fact that rangelands comprise over half of the world's land area and supply vital ecosystem services such as food, fiber, and recreation. Therefore, how can we increase public understanding about rangeland systems to heighten awareness and improve rangeland policies and stewardship? The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) will occur in 2026 as approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2022. Many events are planned to celebrate the IYRP, with a major emphasis on expanding global awareness. The FIFA World Cup is also happening in 2026, which after the Summer Olympics is one of the greatest world sporting events. This sporting event is held once every four years. The most recent FIFA World Cup was hosted by Qatar and was watched by over five billion people (61% of the global human population). For the first time in history, the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be hosted by multiple nations: the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Can the IYRP leverage attention for the 2026 FIFA World Cup to boost public appreciation for global rangelands and pastoralism? If so, how might this be achieved? Social media offers several tools and opportunities that could be useful to this end. In the lead-up to the games, for example, creative posts of rangeland residents playing soccer on unique, beautiful, and remote landscapes combined with targeted messaging could attract a large audience. This poster will explore various social media options, tentative frameworks or approaches, and the general feasibility for achieving impact. Partnerships with groups such as the IYRP Pastoralist Youth Working Group - distributed across 11 regions worldwide- could help provide raw material in the form of videos, photos, text, and artwork.

Introduction

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2014), rangelands occupy 54% of all land on Earth, and at least 30% of land in the United States is rangelands (NRCS, 2024). Rangelands are home to an estimated 200 million people worldwide, which represent approximately 2.5% of the world population. Nevertheless, people often do not know or recognize the importance of rangelands in their lives. In North

America, rangelands are particularly important for livestock and fiber production, wildlife habitat, and recreational activities among other things. The mission of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026) is to promote an understanding and appreciation of rangelands around the world, the people who manage them, and their contributions to all communities.

The objective of this project is to try to use social media as a platform to bring awareness to the general public as to what rangelands and pastoralists are. As of October 2024, 63.8% of the global population uses social media (DataReportal, 2024). Furthermore, 94.5% of the world’s internet operators use social media at least once a month and the typical social user spends more than 2 hours per day on social media (Figure 1). These statistics show that social media could be a great way to reach a larger audience for the IYRP 2026. Our project will also take advantage of the FIFA World Cup 2026 happening in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The 2022 FIFA World Cup was able to engage over five billion people; which represents roughly 61% of the world population. Using this attractive event, which is watched and followed by a very large portion of the general public could be an effective way to talk about rangelands and pastoralists to people who might not be familiar with rangelands and the people working those lands.

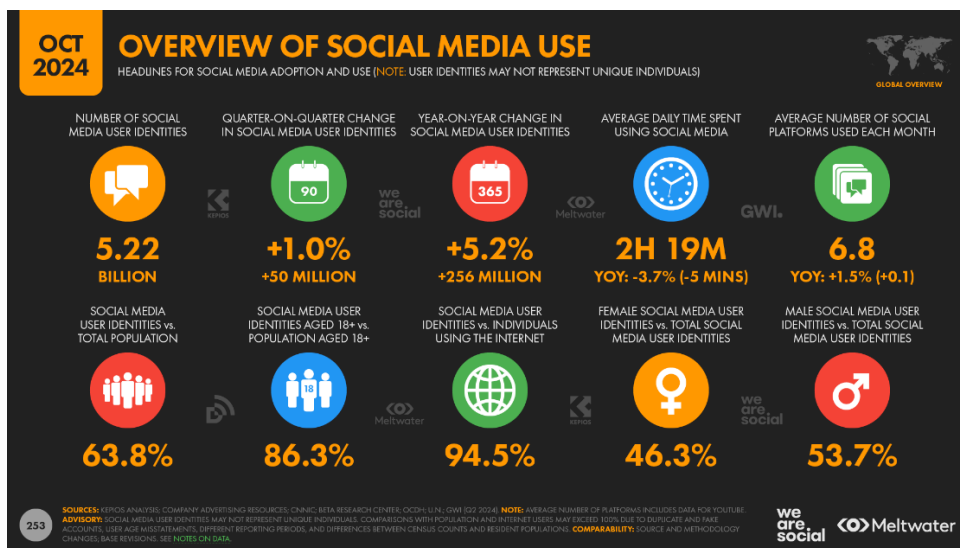


Figure 1: Overview of Social Media Use (DataReportal, 2024)

Methods

As of December 2024, our project is in the preliminary stage of development. Currently, the project has no funding. However, the core team is working on three main general ideas. The project was presented for the first time at the Society for Range Management (SRM) Annual Meeting in Spokane, Washington in February 2025. At this international meeting, we received feedback from rangeland scientists and professionals on our three main ideas to help us move forward with this project. The audience was very receptive and provided useful advice. We also used this opportunity to collect contact information of people who could provide photos and/or videos for our social media platforms. Our project is divided in two major components, namely: the FIFA World Cup Outreach and the Social Media Outreach.

There are 11 IYRP 2026 regions around the world (i.e. the Arctic, Australia/Oceania, Central Asia & Mongolia, East Asia, Eastern & Southern Africa, Europe, North Africa & Middle East, North America, South America, South Asia, and West & Central Africa). Our plan is to represent and engage each region as much as we can. On our team, we have representants of the IYRP 2026 Pastoralist Youth Forum which will also help us engage youth in this outreach project.

FIFA World Cup Outreach

The final product for the 2026 FIFA World Cup Outreach may be about 10 videos (if possible) to be launched from March 2026 to July 2026 on social media. There will be two videos a month that will be viewed before


the FIFA World Cup and during the sporting event. We will collect footage from all around the world of pastoralists playing soccer on rangelands. As a result, we will be able to have a diversity of footage which shows the variety of pastoralists and rangelands worldwide. Some of these videos will showcase traditional clothing worn by pastoralists around the world to illustrate material culture. In the videos, a soccer ball will roll through the different landscapes where pastoralists pass it to each other across the screen to establish connectivity among the different rangelands. For each video, there will be music, some text regarding facts about pastoralists and rangelands, and the IYRP 2026 logo and website. In order to simplify the editing work for this project as it is solely volunteer based, we have a demonstration production video to standardize approaches and illustrate filming recommendations. We will identify a network of people in the field who would be in charge of collecting footage for each IYRP region.

Social Media Outreach

For this part, we have two ideas. First, we will create monthly short videos based on the IYRP 2026 monthly themes (Figure 2). These short videos will be a photo montage of all of the 11 IYRP 2026 regions around the world. For each video, we will have photos, music, some text regarding facts about pastoralists and rangelands, and the IYRP 2026 logo and website. We will also have a rolling credit page at the end to thank each photographer for their contributions to the project. We plan to have the same structure for each video to provide a consistent message for the general public. Second, we will do a weekly “*Find the IYRP 2026 logo in this photo, and learn an interesting fact about rangelands and pastoralists around the world! #IYRP2026 #SRM*” on social media (Figure 3). This will allow us to share 52 photos over the year 2026 representing rangelands and pastoralists worldwide. We will post a photo on social media every Tuesday with a hidden IYRP 2026 logo, and on Fridays, we would announce where the logo was hidden and will give an explanation of what is shown in the photo. As we know, photos are a very powerful way of communicating! All of our social media outreach will be in English, Spanish and French.



Figure 2: IYRP Themes

Find this logo , and learn an interesting fact about rangelands and pastoralists around the world! #IYRP #SRM



This is a nomadic migration in Western Mongolia. Between a desire to settle down, a wish to continue this ancestral tradition and the looming threat of ecological collapse, Kazakh families are still migrating through the vast Mongolian landscape.

Thomas Cytrynowicz

Figure 3: Example of the Find the IYRP logo social media outreach idea

Timeline

The first half of 2025 will be focused on collecting footage (videos and photos) from partners and colleagues. The second half of 2025 will be focused on video and photo production. The year 2026 will be focused on distribution (Figure 4).

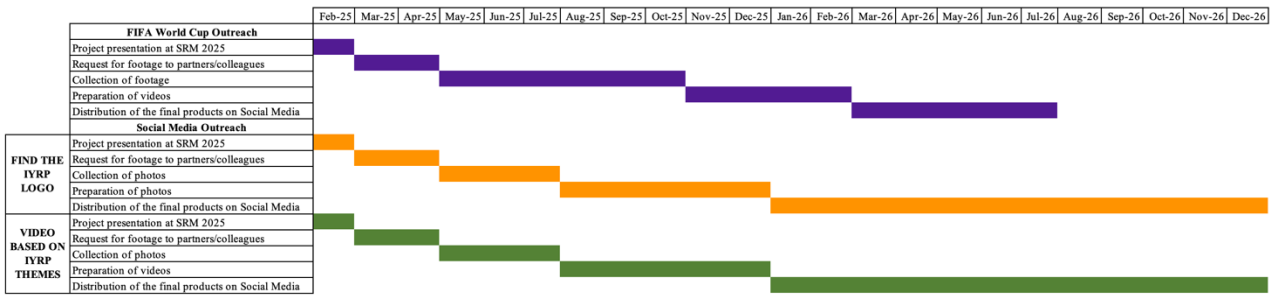


Figure 4: Outreach Projects Timeline

Overall, due to the statistics on the world’s top social media platforms, our focus will be on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram (Figure 5; DataReportal, 2024)

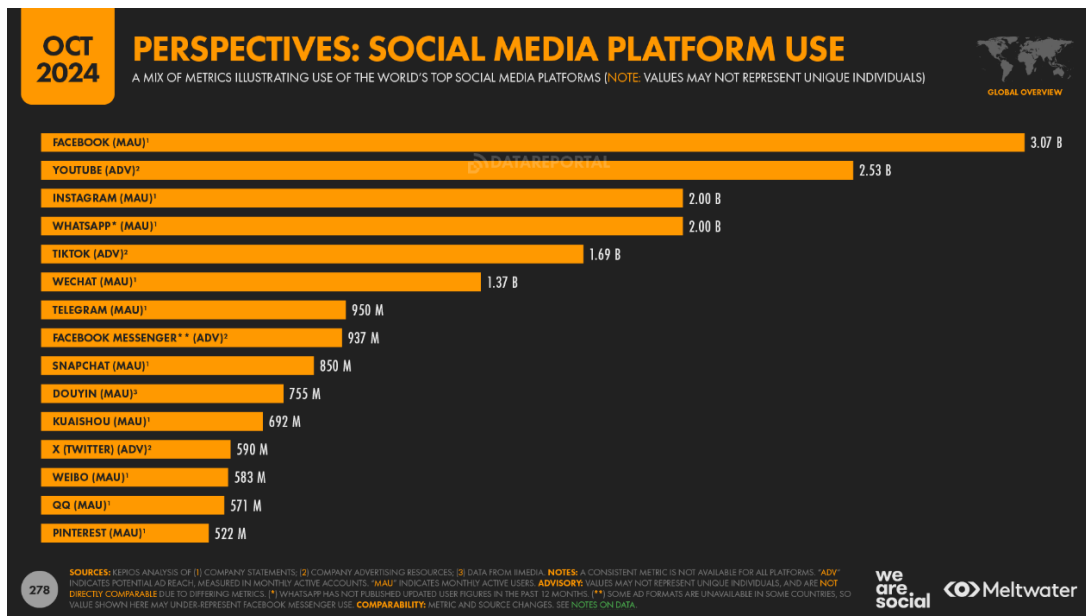


Figure 5: Social Media Platform Use (DataReportal, 2024)

Results

Because this project is still in a preliminary phase, we do not have any results to share yet. However, we plan to collect engagement data on the different social media platforms in order to learn more about the impacts of the outreach project. The data collected include, but are not limited to views, likes, comments, reactions, and shares.

Discussion/Conclusions/Implications

Because this project is still in a preliminary phase, we cannot yet discuss results or project impacts. However, our objective is to bring awareness about rangelands and pastoralists to the general public during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists in 2026. We anticipate to achieve this with this project.

We received useful feedback on our ideas during the Society for Range Management Conference in February 2025. We submitted a funding request (pending) to the Society for Range Management to hire a professional editor for the videos related to the FIFA World Cup. We believe that our ideas will evolve with time and that new perspectives might emerge in the next few months. Other ideas are already emerging. For example, we may hold a mini-competition for the best soccer video with a soccer ball with the IYRP logo as a prize. This and other ideas may grow if funding sources are located.

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